

Reading Russian Documents: Death Records

Russia “How to” Guide, Intermediate Level: Instruction

October 2019

GOAL

This guide will teach you:

- Important vocabulary related to death records.
- How to read a Russian Orthodox columnar death entry.
- How to read a Russian language death record for a person in the Russian partition of Poland.

INTRODUCTION

You may want to consult the following “How to” Guides before continuing:

- [Cyrillic Alphabet](#)
- [Cyrillic Script](#)
- Reading Russian Documents: The Alphabet
- Reading Russian Documents: Deciphering the Handwriting and Understanding the Grammar

The table below reflects important vocabulary that you may find in death records.

English	Russian
Death	кончина, смерть
Died	умер (M); умерла (F)
Deceased	умерший
Parents	родители
Daughter	дочь
Son	сын
Husband	муж
Wife	жена

For additional vocabulary, please see the [Russian Genealogical Word List](#).¹

Place Names and Jurisdictions

The Russian Empire consisted of jurisdictions called *guberni* (singular form: *gubernia*), *oblasti* (singular form: *oblast*), *uyezdi* (singular form: *uyezd*) and *okruga* (singular form: *okrug*). The European, or Western Russian Empire, was divided into guberni, or states. The guberni were then further subdivided into smaller districts or counties called uyezdi. The Caucasus, Central Asia and Far East areas were also divided into states called oblasti, and counties known as okruga.² There are several variations for the word village or town, as illustrated in the table below.

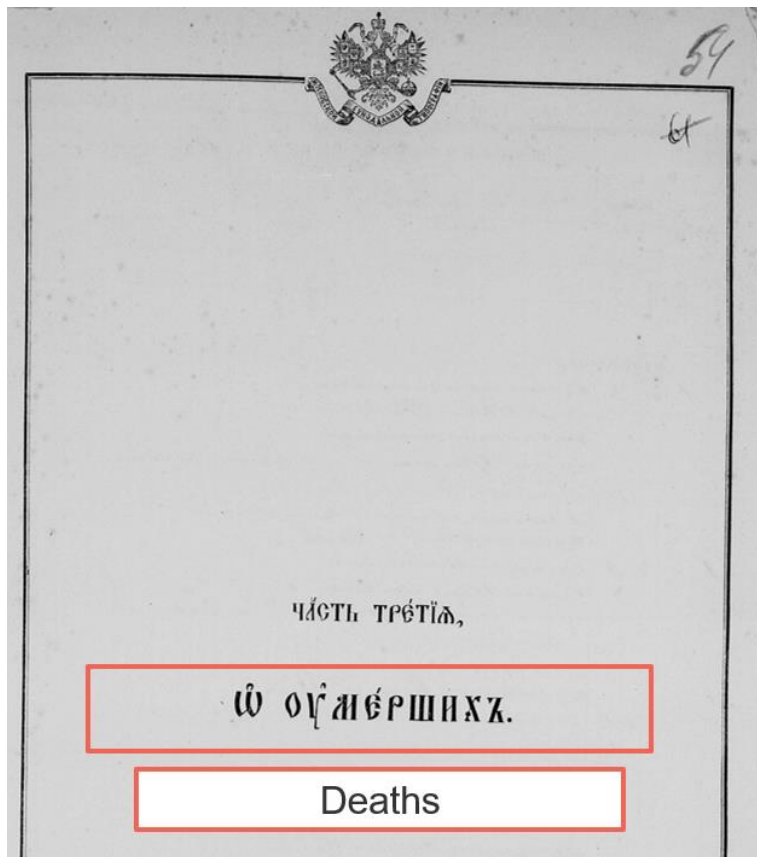
English	Russian
province/state/gubernia/ oblast	Губерния/область
county/district/uyezd/ okrug	Уезд/округ
village	село, деревня, посад

¹ "Russian Genealogical Word List," *FamilySearch Wiki* (<http://familysearch.org/wiki>).

² Sergei G. Pushkarev, *Dictionary of Russian Historical Terms from the Eleventh Century to 1917*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970); 28, 69, 74, 167.

HOW TO

Beginning in 1722, Russian Orthodox churches were required to keep a record of birth, marriage and death records. There was no standardization until 1806, when a printed form was established. In 1838, the form was revised slightly and remained in use until the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917/1918.³ This guide will teach you how to read the form used between 1838 and 1917/1918.



Look for a Cover Page

Orthodox Church books are often organized by year and subcategorized by record type – birth, marriage and death. Cover pages mark the separation of birth, marriage, and death records. To the left is an example of a cover page for death records. The year may be written on the cover page for death records, or it may be written in the preceding section, in this case, births.

Although this and the headings found within the church books will be written in Church Slavonic, you do NOT need to know how to read Church Slavonic to read an Orthodox death record. Translations of column headings are provided for you below, and the entries will be written in handwritten Cyrillic script.

³ "Russia Church Records," *FamilySearch Wiki* (<http://familysearch.org/wiki>).

Column Headings

Russian Orthodox Church books consist of a left and right page. Translations of the column headings are provided below.

Metrical book for the [year of]					
Number		Month and Day	Standing, name, patronymic and surname of the deceased	Age	Cause of Death
Male	Female	Death		Male	Female
23	-	30 2.	Семёновъ Иванъ Петровичъ Рязанский Готфридъ		


The number column is the xth death in that year. The gender will be found in the corresponding column.

In the date column, if you do not find the month written above the numeric date, check the entries above. The name of the month may be written at the top of the page, or at the beginning of a new month.

The column containing information about the deceased generally consists of the following format:

Location, standing (if female, information about husband/father will be provided including the father/husband/s standing, name and relationship), name of the deceased.

65



мвн Г О Д К, Ч А С Т Ь Т Р Е Т Ъ Я, Ѡ О Ъ М Ё Р Ш Ы Х К.

<div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> Who administered the confession and communion </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> Who performed the burial, and where they were buried </div>
	<i>Вспомогательная</i>

Paragraph Form (In Russian Partition of Poland)

To learn how to read a Polish death record written in Russian, please see the [Reading Russian Death Records \(In Poland\) "How to" Guide](#).⁴

⁴ "Reading Russian Death Records (In Poland)," FamilySearch Wiki, Russia "How to" Guides (<http://familysearch.org/wiki>).